486
553s
no. 53

Library of the
PACIFIC UNITARIAN SCHOOL
FOR THE MINISTRY
Berkeley, California

Sermons of James Freeman Clarke

UNITARIAN BELIEF

XII. THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

BOSTON
GEO. H. ELLIS, 141 FRANKLIN STREET
1891

SERMONS

OF

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

It is proposed to continue the publication, under this title, of pamphlets by Mr. Clarke, this being the twelfth of a series on Unitarian Belief.

PRICE: Single copies 5 cents each, or three dollars per hundred.

GEORGE H. ELLIS,

141 Franklin St., Boston, Mass.

The Brotherhood of Man.

"God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." — Acts x. 28.

It is often said by Unitarians and other liberal Christians that the two essential doctrines of Christianity are the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. I agree to this; but what do we mean by these words? We talk of Orthodox phrases and Orthodox cant; but there may easily be Unitarian phrases and Unitarian cant. Statements frequently made and repeated cease at last to represent any genuine mental experience, and become like a hollow drum or a tinkling cymbal,— sound, and nothing else. This is the way that cant arrives. At first there is a genuine conviction and a real feeling. This is expressed in some happy formula. Then the formula is repeated, because it is a good one, until the primary sense fades out of it. People repeat the old empty phrase, not meaning anything by it,— not because they are hypocrites, but because it had a meaning once; and they hope, by repeating the words, to revive and refresh the meaning. But Jesus, foreseeing the danger lying in this direction, said, "Use no vain repetitions." I should be sorry if such good expressions as "God's fatherhood" and "man's brotherhood" should ever become trivial; and, in order to prevent it as far as we may, let us take one of

them this morning, and look for the meaning and reason of it.

What do we mean by the brotherhood of man?

Let us look at it first negatively, and see what it does not mean.

When we say that all men are our brothers, we do not mean to say that all are equally near and dear to us; that we have the same love, respect, and sympathy, for all; or that we ought to treat all in the same way.

There is no such equality between human beings; nor can there be. God has placed us in nearer relations to some than to others. He draws out our sympathy more toward some than toward others. We cannot help loving and honoring some more than we do others. We cannot and ought not to love a base, low, selfish man as we love a high-minded, generous, honorable, and true soul. Among the disciples there was one whom Jesus especially loved, no doubt because he was especially lovable. Among his friends, Jesus especially loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

Therefore, the brotherhood of man does not consist in looking on all men as alike. A man may be our brother, and yet not a good man. Though a bad man, he is still our brother. We might be so unfortunate as to have a brother who would steal a railroad, pack a convention, or make an immense fortune by swindling transactions. We could not love him as much as if he were an honorable, upright man whose life was white as snow.

We may believe all men our brethren, and yet not confound moral distinctions,—not put good for evil or evil for good, right for wrong or darkness for light.

Nor can moral diseases be always cured by gentle treat-

ment. The laws of God are strict and stern, and bountifully so. He who sows to the flesh must of the flesh reap destruction, and he who sows to the spirit reaps life everlasting. Some men have to be put in prison. It is the only safe place for them. It is what they need for their own good; and it is a cruel kindness which causes so many criminals to be pardoned and turned loose on the community, to recommence a career of crime. I would improve all the prisons, and make them schools of moral reform. I would give more liberty and privilege within the prison to those who made good use of their privileges. But I would not have them come out until there was good reason to believe that they were entirely reformed. If my brother is an inebriate, I do not furnish him with the means of intoxication, but put him in an asylum. The doctrine of human brotherhood does not require or encourage any sentimental philanthropy, which treats bad men as though they were not bad, and tries to cure them with sugar-plums.

But it means this: that we are to take an interest in all men, high and low, ignorant and wise, bad and good. It means that we are to depise no man, call no man common or unclean, and not to say of any one, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We should take an interest in them, because God takes an interest in them, because they are his children.

This does not seem much to say, but it involves a revolution, an entire change in society. We do not take an interest in each other now, do not care for men as if they were really our brothers.

For example, do we take an interest in the condition, needs, thoughts, feelings, of the poor, as if they were our

brethren? Some persons do. There are some who know how they live, in cellars, crowded together in alleys, in unventilated homes, where dirt and disease must necessarily come. Some there are who are seeking to give them better homes, who study the problem of tenement-houses, who give time and thought to it, who seek to know what are the real dangers and temptations which come with poverty. That is to consider them as brethren. But the great majority of people who are comfortable, who are above want, live on for years, side by side with the suffering classes, and know no more about their sufferings than if they were of the tribes discovered by Stanley in the heart of Africa.

Less than that; for books are written about these. We read with interest what Cameron and Stanley say about the savages of Africa, what Wallace says about the peasants in Russia, what Griffis says about the people of Japan. But who travels in the back streets and slums of London, New York, and Boston, and writes about their savages? A few years ago, a man in London did undertake that exploration, and spent a night in one of the homes provided in London for casual visitors, went to see the haunts of tramps, and astonished all England by this rash adventure. I suppose that the suffering classes in Boston are, in reality, as far off from the sympathies of most of us as the suffering classes in China or India. People go to study *their* condition, and write about it; but who studies the needs of his next-door neighbors? Thousands of children die every summer in our cities of diseases caused by dirt and crowded homes; and our churches, occupied by discussions of theology never think of asking whether or not they are their brothers' keepers.

Hence it is that the masses, as we call them, are left to be the victims of demagogues who want their votes; of those who offer to lead them out of their misery into some fools' paradise of inflation, where the government is to provide all men with farms and houses and cattle, and a pocket full of greenbacks. People must have leaders; and, if the wise do not lead them, the ignorant will.

This illustrates what I mean by human brotherhood. It does not consist in giving money to the poor or merely building hospitals for the sick, but in knowing the wretched, taking an interest in them, studying their needs and the causes of their sufferings, and patiently applying the remedy, not to masses, but to individuals.

For God is their Father as he is ours. Since he made them, he made them all for something, sees something good in all of them, means something good for them.

When I read the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and ask what it means, I find its moral to be that we ought to take an interest in all men as our brethren. Dives does not seem to have been a bad man. There was no harm in his being rich nor enjoying his riches. He was no worse than we are. He simply took no interest in Lazarus. It was no affair of his that Lazarus lay at his gate full of sores. Lazarus does not lie before our front door, for the police would make him move on. He lies in the next street, in a cellar or a garret. Now, what the rich man needed was to be made to feel that it *was* an affair of his; he needed to suffer, in order to learn that lesson. He had to go to school in Hades for his own benefit.

"To each his sufferings. All are men,
Condemned alike to groan,—
The feeling for another's woe,
The unfeeling for his own."

Virgil knew the truth of this law when he made Dido say, "I myself have suffered, and I can pity the sufferers." The rich man could not pity others until he had suffered himself. But we find from the parable that already he had begun to learn this sympathy. He remembered his brothers. When he found that he must bear his own pains, and that they could not be lessened, he wished at least to prevent his brethren from being tormented in that flame. That shows that he was being converted from his selfish indifference, and was becoming generous. God in his goodness will teach us sympathy for others by our own pain if we do not learn it in some other way. Yellow fever comes, as a frightful warning, saying, "If you allow the poor of your cities to die from want of proper drainage, I will teach you that they are your brethren by sending death from their homes into yours." We must learn thatl esson willingly, or else unwillingly.

All men have claims upon us for thought, interest, good will. When we draw lines, build walls, to shut our fellow-men out from our sympathies, we violate this law of brotherhood.

The Jews did this in regard to the Samaritans. They would have no dealings with the accursed race which dwelt in Sychar. Therefore, Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan to shame them out of this prejudice.

When Judge Taney said that the negroes of this country "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect," he uttered a phrase by which he will be always

remembered. For a single phrase is sometimes a plank on which a man will float down the stream of time. Such a phrase is the quintessence of a vague, wide-reaching feeling. A nebulous sentiment is suddenly concentrated and expressed in such an utterance; and the man who happens to say it achieves an immortality of fame or infamy. When the Roman poet, Terence, said, "I am a man, and nothing which concerns men can be indifferent to me," he fastened himself to that plank, and floats on it still. When Cain said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" he attached himself to a plank of a different kind. For, after all, humanity is human, and will treasure the memory of any greatly humane idea with gratitude, will remember with censure the expression of any inhuman one.

This ought to be considered by patriots at this time, who think they shall immortalize themselves by denouncing the Chinese and putting them outside the pale of human sympathy. These utterances, also, will bring infamy on those who utter them.

When the people of this country learned that the colored people had rights which they were bound to respect, they took a step upward themselves in the scale of being.

Their next step will be, perhaps, to learn that the Chinese have rights; that they are our brothers, also; that they have as good right to come to this continent which the Lord has prepared for his poor as the Irish have, or the Germans, or as our own fathers had. This is not our land: it is God's land. Who gave us any monopoly of it? The Indians have a better right to it than we. The people of Asia have as good a right to come here from the west as the people of Europe had to

come here from the east. The Chinese are God's people as much as we. They are industrious, economical, neat, respectful to parents. They can teach young America many things it needs to know. In this country, where labor is scarce, we need more of it; and the more there is of it, the better will the condition of the laboring class ultimately become. There is room for all here. The demagogue who denounces any people may obtain a temporary popularity, but he is doomed to a lasting infamy.

On the same grounds I am opposed, I do not say to the protection of American industry, but to the principle often laid down for protection.

I am opposed to founding a tariff of duties on an unchristian principle. You ought not to endeavor to build up manufactures on an artificial, hot-house system, so as to be independent of other nations. You say that we must be independent of them, so that in case of war we can make all we want. But God has not made the world on that plan. He has not intended we should be independent of each other. No man and no nation liveth to itself. God has made different climates, soils, shores, races, educations, and civilizations, so that men may do different things. He has put coal and iron in England, so that England may become a manufacturing nation. He has spread the sunny plains of France and her rich hillsides, that she may produce wine and silk; the broad steppes of Russia and prairies of Illinois, that they may raise bread for the human race. Some countries have indented shores and multitudinous harbors, in order to educate sailors and develop commerce. Thus God has made his world, and does not mean that any race shall be independent of any other. He means that we shall be

dependent on each other. He does not mean that each nation shall be in a fortress, ready to fight.

Let manufactures spring up naturally, as they are needed to supply neighboring markets.

These doctrines of national independence are the root of bloody wars. Nations have been taught to regard each other as rivals instead of brothers. The French could never have been led by Napoleon to make his unprovoked and inexcusable war on Prussia if they had not been educated to believe that their nation ought to be the great nation of Europe, and that, when France was satisfied, there might be peace, not otherwise. The King of Prussia, having beaten back the French invasion and paralyzed the French power, ought to have halted his victorious armies, and said: "Frenchmen, we are your brethren! We do not wish to interfere with you or to diminish your territory. We wish only security that we shall not be attacked again. Dismantle your frontier fortresses, and we will make peace." No material guarantees could be half so great a security for Prussia as the gratitude of France; for France is a nation moved by sentiment, capable of feeling and appreciating generosity in an enemy. Magnanimity on the part of the Prussians in their hour of victory would have been a better boundary line against any future French attack than any fortresses or mountain chains.

The doctrine of the brotherhood of man is not taught in so many words anywhere in the New Testament. The largest view of brotherhood is taken by Jesus, when he says, "Whosoever will do the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." "Brethren," in the New Testament, means always fellow-Christians. Not all are breth-

ren, but all may become brethren. Christianity has broken down the partition walls of race, nation, language.

This narrow principle which has so long been taught, of the need of being independent of other nations, has borne fruit in the doctrine concerning currency, which declares that we must have an American currency, independent of the rest of the world. This doctrine makes wars between nations possible, which otherwise could never take place. Nations are not regarded as families of brethren, but as hostile camps or well-defended fortresses. Germany watches France, England watches Russia, and all keep up great armaments, for which they tax the poor and take their children as soldiers.

In the account of the judgment, Jesus has described the heathen (for "Before him shall be gathered all nations" really ought to be "Before him shall be gathered all the Gentiles, or heathen"). He shows how the heathen, who had never heard of him, should be accepted or rejected according to their good works done or neglected. This goes beyond the barriers of race, creed, and religion, to unite all good men in one family.

The doctrine of Christianity, then, is not that we are to call all men our brethren, but that we are to make them so. No good is done by saying that a man is our brother, if he has no brotherly feeling to us, nor we to him. But Jesus taught that outside of every boundary, outside of race, party, creed, there was this great possibility of brotherhood. It is our business to believe in that root and to develop that fruit. Our duty is not to say," "Brother! brother!" any more than to say, "Lord! Lord! There may be just as much cant in one as in the other. But it is to feel that no man is so far off that he cannot

be brought nigh, no man so low down that he cannot be raised up, no man so bad that he cannot be made better, no man so disagreeable or distasteful that there may not be in him the elements of brotherhood.

This is the way in which Christ breaks down partition walls. In this way he is the atoning principle in the world, bringing those who are afar off nigh, teaching us not to love each other in word or tongue, but in deed and in truth.

These pamphlets are sent by the Church of the Disciples, Boston. Any one who wishes for more reading of the same kind is invited to write to

P. O. Mission, The Church of the Disciples,

Corner West Brookline St. and Warren Avenue

Boston, Mass.